

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post-Office.

No. 9.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 19, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE DETECTIVE; OR, THE RED RIDERS OF THE RANGE.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Bold Blackburn, the leader of the Red Riders of the Range, had played his last card. Sedgwick suddenly heard some one calling to him, and turning he beheld Young Wild West and the detective beckoning to him.

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CHAPTER I.

HARRY HARPER.

"Do you know anything about the young fellow they call Young Wild West?"

This question was asked of the driver of the stage coach that ran between Spondulicks and Weston, two red-hot mining towns situated in the southern part of what was then called Dakota Territory.

The man who asked the question had climbed upon a seat beside the driver just as the outfit was to leave Spondulicks on its regular trip to Weston.

The driver sized his questioner up, and then, with a smile that was half pitying, said:

"Do I know anything about the fellow they call Young Wild West? Well, I reckon I do! He's jest about ther gamest piece of stuff that ever lived in these diggin's! Why, stranger, he is only a boy yet, but he holds the name of being ther champion dead-shot of ther West, an' he's so cool an' daring that ther old boy himself wouldn't make him flinch. Then, ag'in, some people call him ther Prince of ther Saddle when they speak of him. They call him that jest because that's jest what he is—he has never found his match at ridin' a horse! Young Wild West are a gentleman, too, stranger, but he would be a bad man to stack up ag'in, if you was in ther wrong."

"Oh, I don't expect to stack up against him, friend," replied the stranger. "I am much obliged to you for your information. I have heard considerable about Young Wild

West, and I am going over to Weston on purpose to see him and have a talk with him."

"You look as though you might be from ther East, stranger," and the driver cracked his long-lashed whip at the leaders, and the journey over the mountain began.

"Yes, I am from the East. That is where I was born and bred, but I have just come in from Denver, where I have been stopping a few weeks."

"Then yer knows something about ther country out here?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, stranger, as we've got a good fifteen mile jaunt ahead of us, an' you seem to act as though you're goin' to sit up here with me, we ought to know each other, I'm thinkin'. My name is Shep Morey; what might yours be?"

"Oh!" answered the stranger with a smile. "My name is Harry Harper."

"Wall, Harry Harper, I've taken a sorter notion to yer. Put here there!" and the driver changed the reins to his left hand and gave the passenger on the box a hearty shake.

"Thank you. How far is Deadwood from here?"

"About ninety miles, I reckon. Ever been there?"

"No."

"Well, it ain't much of a place. Weston kin beat it all holler."

"So I have heard. Say! Young Wild West has started quite a business in Weston, I hear?"

"Yes, he an' his friends staked out claims that adjoined one another an' then formed what they call ther Wild West Mining and Improvement Company. They built a nice

shanty for an office an' put up shanties to live in. It are said that they formed ther company to boom ther town, an' it did boom it, too!"

"How many are in the company?"

"I don't know. Lemme see. There's old Dove-Eye, who's one of ther first men what located at what is now called Weston. He's a regular ring-tailed roarer an' honest as ther day is long. He's ther president of ther company. Then there's Jim Dart, a young feller about ther same age as Young Wild West, he's ther seekertary. Young Wild West is ther treasurer an' chairman of ther board of trustees, which is made up of him an' a dandy scout named Cheyenne Charlie, an' another scout who came over from Fort Bridger named Jack Robedee. They are all dead-shots, an' it is said that ther five of 'em could lick a hundred Sioux Injuns or stand off a troop of cavalry. Young Wild West is ther boss of 'em, an' what he says is never disputed by any of the company, or any one else what knows him, for that matter."

"These people have cleaned out some pretty tough gangs, haven't they?"

"I guess they have!" exclaimed the driver. "If it hadn't been for Young Wild West an' his crowd I reckon we wouldn't be ridin' along here without a guard of half a dozen good men. They've jest made it hard livin' for road agents an' renegades, they have. When Young Wild West starts in to hunt out a bad gang they might jest as well give in, for they always go. They generally dance out of ther world with ther feet touchin' nothin' to ther tune that's made by hot lead pills whistlin' through ther air!"

"I see," and Harry Harper nodded as though he was glad to hear such talk about Young Wild West.

Harper was a rather lightly built, athletic looking man of thirty.

His keen, gray eyes and smooth face gave him the appearance of an actor more than anything else, though it would be hard for the average man to judge what he was.

His light hair was cropped close to a head which was topped off with a straw hat, such as are worn by men who hail from the East, or where more polished society than could be found in that region holds sway.

The baggy blue flannel suit he wore did not set off his form to any great advantage. It was about two sizes too large for him, and the pockets it contained seemed to be filled with bulky articles, which served to make it set upon him worse than it would otherwise have done.

There was nothing to indicate that he carried a weapon of any sort, though Shep Morey, the driver of the stage coach, would have been willing to lay a twenty-dollar gold piece that he had a shooter about him, and that he knew how to use it, too.

Shep had sized him up with the conclusion that he was no tenderfoot, even if he was dressed like one.

The stage coach did not have a great many passengers that morning.

There were only four men and a woman inside and Harry Harper outside, in the company of the driver.

The woman was journeying to Weston to meet her husband and make her home with him there.

She was about fifty, stout and rather crabbed, it seemed, as she wanted nearly the whole side of the vehicle to herself, strewing that portion which she could not otherwise use with bundles.

The four men, who had become acquainted in some way, smiled at her fussiness, and when the stage gave a sudden jolt and sent some of her bundles on the floor one of them laughed outright.

He was a dark, sinister looking man of forty, wearing a big slouch hat, and his upper lip and chin were adorned with a heavy black mustache and beard.

"You needn't laugh, you black muzzled brute!" snapped the woman. "I didn't expect to get insulted when I got in this rig. I thought I was in the company of gentlemen."

Only one of the men flushed at this sharp remark.

His appearance would indicate that he was one of the many who had come a long distance to seek his fortune in the Black Hills.

The other three laughed heartily at the woman, and when the fellow who had been abashed by her remark started to help her pick up the bundles, they told him to stop.

"Let the old cat do that herself," said the man with the big slouch hat. "She has tried to make it unpleasant for us from the very start."

The woman looked daggers at him; but said no more.

She soon settled back into as comfortable a position as she could find and fell asleep.

Then the four men got into a game of cards, which had to be played with no little difficulty, owing to the jolting of the hard-riding vehicle.

And so the time passed till the fork of the roads was reached.

This spot was little more than half way to Weston, and was where a person coming from Weston could take his choice of going to the right to the prairie beyond, or the left to Spondulicks.

Suddenly the man with the black mustache and beard reached over and seized the sleeping woman by the shoulder.

A revolver appeared in his other hand at the same time.

"Hand over what money and valuables you have got!" he hissed. "Hurry up, you she-cat, or I'll let daylight through you!"

Half asleep and nearly frightened out of her wits, the old lady gazed at him with distended jaws.

The quiet man, who had been playing a losing game of cards with the other three, started to rise to his feet and instinctively slid his hand toward his coat pocket.

"None of that!" said the fellow next to him in a loud whisper. "Hold up your hands! You are in ther same boat with ther old woman!"

There were three revolvers exposed to view now, instead of one, and it struck the man very forcibly that he and the woman were destined to be the victims of clever highway-men.

"Shell out—the pair of you!" cried the villain with the "black muzzle," to use the old lady's words. "There isn't

any fun about this, I want you to understand. If you don't shell out at once without making an outcry the three of us will begin to shoot! You know what that means. You'll both die right where you are!"

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned the fat woman, and then she produced about thirty dollars in money and an old silver watch from some hidden part of her clothing.

"Is that all?" asked the leader of the robbers, as he bowed politely and took it.

"Yes, an' I'm sorry it is so much," was the reply. "Here I've been starving myself an' travelin' as cheap as I could, so I would have a little left of what my husband sent me to get out here, an' now it is all gone! If I'd known this I'd have spent it all an' lived high on the way. Why don't you kill me, an' have done with it?"

"Do you want me to?" and the robber made a move as though he was going to shoot.

"I dare you to, you black muzzled scoundrel!" was the retort in a defiant tone.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the man.

Meanwhile the other two men had gone through the other victim, and without further words they opened the door of the stage coach.

The instant they did this the old lady began to scream at the top of her voice.

This was what the robbers wanted her to do, for the driver pulled up the horses to see what was the matter, and that gave them a chance to leap to the ground with safety.

Scarcely more than a second elapsed when they were out upon the ground and making for a clump of rocks at the side of the road.

"Murder! Robbers!" screamed the woman, now becoming hysterical.

Crack! Crack!

Shep Morey, the driver, and Harry Harper, the passenger on the box beside him, sent a couple of shots after the fleeing villains.

But they were not quick enough, and the bullets merely flattened against the rocks.

"By the living jingo!" cried Harper. "I must say that I have been completely deceived by those three men. If I had known that they were robbers you can bet they would never have got away like that."

"A very neat trick they have played on us," replied the driver. "I wonder why they did not try to take the mail bags?"

"They—— Lookout! Here they come again! Start the horses, for we won't stand any show with that gang!"

Out upon the road a score of riders suddenly dashed.

They all wore red shirts and plumes of the same color in their hats.

Shep Morey no sooner saw them coming when he plied the whip and away went the four horses hitched to the stage coach on a mad gallop.

A volley was fired by the horsemen in red, but it did no damage, luckily for those in the vehicle.

For some strange reason the band did not pursue the

stage coach over a hundred yards, and it thundered over the rough mountain road.

"I am just a little bit surprised at what has happened," said Harper, as the horses were brought down to a slower gait. "Not much, either."

"Well, I'm a whole lot surprised," gasped Morey. "Them fellows in red is somethin' entirely new around these parts."

"Yes?"

"Never seen or heard of 'em before."

"Well, the chances are that you will see more of them if you keep on at the job you have now got."

"Oh! I'll stick to my job, don't think I'm scared. But I'll have some good men to go with, you kin bet, especially when they mail has got much value to it, or there is a moneyed lot of passengers aboard."

"That's the way to talk!" exclaimed Harper. "You are made out of the right sort of stuff, Morey. I like men of your sort."

"Say, what kind of a man are you, anyway, Harry Harper?"

"Oh! I'm all right, I guess."

"I guess so, too. Why, you got your gun out an' fired afore I could."

"That's because you had the reins in your hands, I guess."

"Well, mebbe it was, but you got ahead of me, anyway."

At this juncture the woman inside of the coach began yelling like mad.

She had dropped into a slight faint as the robbers fled, and now she had come out of it and was bound to make herself heard.

"Keep quiet, lady!" called out the driver. "I don't want to stop jest yet. There's a whole gang of robbers after us, an' they are liable to pounce on us any minute!"

"She's one of them wimmin what's got no reason in her, or anything else," he added to his neighbor on the seat. "I sized her up ther moment I seen her comin' to git in ther rig. I wouldn't want to be her husband, hanged if I would!"

Harper shook his head.

"I think it will be safe enough now to stop and quiet her," he observed.

"All right, then. Jest as you say," and Morey soon brought the horses to a halt.

Harry Harper got down off the seat and told the woman that it was useless for her to set up such a howl. She had been robbed, but it could not be helped, and so on.

"That's what I've been tryin' to tell her," spoke up the other victim of the robbery. "They took everything I had, even to my tobacco. I feel bad over it, but what's the use of cryin' about it. She's got a husband in Weston to look out for her, an' I'll strike there without a cent."

This remark, for a wonder, had some effect on the woman.

"I shan't say any more," she exclaimed. "Go on with the horses! Them men might come back."

The stage coach rumbled off again, and there was no further mishap on the way.

When Weston came in sight the outfit was on time, and a few minutes later it drew up in front of the post office.

"Quite a town, I must say," observed Harry Harper, as he got ready to get down from the box.

"You bet it is!" was the reply. "See that fine looking young feller talkin' to that old man over there?"

"Yes. Who is he?"

"That's Young Wild West."

"Good! I will have a talk to him at once."

Harper dropped lightly to the ground and walked over to where the boy and man were talking at the corner of the post office building.

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG WILD WEST HEARS ABOUT THE RED RIDERS.

"Excuse me," said Harry Harper, as he stepped up. "Is this Mr. West?"

"Yes," answered Young Wild West, turning and looking at the new arrival sharply. "Did you want to see me, sir?"

"As soon as you are not engaged I should like to talk to you in private for a few minutes."

"Very well. I am at your service now. What can I do for you?"

Harper pulled an envelope from his inner pocket and handed it to Young Wild West.

The young scout took notice that the envelope bore the mark of the government and that it was addressed to Harry Harper, General Delivery, Denver, Col.

"That is my name," said Harper. "But read the contents."

Wild pulled a document out and read the following:

"H. HARPER, ESQ., DENVER, COL.

"DEAR SIR: From advices received from the various commandments of the forts in the West, I feel safe to recommend a young man who lives in a town called Weston, and is known as Young Wild West. You will need the assistance of a very shrewd scout and border man to assist you in breaking up the dangerous gang who have been operating in portions of Colorado and Nebraska, and it, therefore, will be to your interest to see this Young Wild West and engage his services. The gentleman in charge of the Government Secret Service Bureau has been authorized to honor all drafts you may make upon him, so that means that you are to spare no expense in efforts to rid the country of the dangerous gang of law-breakers you have nicknamed the Red Riders. Weston is located somewhere in the neighborhood of the mining camp called Deadwood in Southern Dakota, and I anticipate that you will have very little trouble in finding it.

"Hoping that you will make a success of your great undertaking, I remain,

Yours, etc.,

"POSTMASTER GENERAL."

The name of the official was signed to the document, too, and it bore the seal of the United State Government.

When Young Wild West had read it over carefully he handed it back to Harry Harper, and said:

"Mr. Harper, I guess I understand exactly what you want of me; and I assure you that I will only be too glad to help you out all I can."

"Thank you, Mr. West."

"See here," remarked Wild in his free and easy manner. "don't call me Mr. West; Wild is good enough. I don't care to be mistered, unless it is by some big coward, who is trying to put on airs, and goes a little too far. Then I generally want to be called Mister."

"I understand you perfectly," replied Harper, with a smile. "I am only too glad to have the privilege to call you by your first name, but when I do so I shall expect you to call me Harry."

"Oh, certainly. Harry Harper, Government Detective. I am real glad to meet you. I am satisfied that you are made of the right kind of stuff for the calling you have chosen. Shake!"

"Thank you for the opinion you have of me. It does me good to be complimented by such a well known and popular young man as you are!" and the two shook hands in a way that showed both meant exactly what they said.

The driver of the stage coach was telling the bystanders of what had occurred on the way to Weston; the fat woman was crying hysterically in the arms of her husband, and the quiet man, who had been relieved of all he had by the three robbers, stood by, waiting for Harry Harper to get through talking to Young Wild West.

"What is this I hear?" asked Wild. "The outfit held up on the way over from Spondulicks?"

"Yes," replied Harry. "I forgot to tell you about that. We had three passengers to leave Spondulicks with us whom I never dreamed of being anything but plain, ordinary passengers. They proved to be real robbers, though, and I have reason to believe that they belong to the very gang I am after."

"Yes? What makes you think that?"

"Why, right after they made their escape from the stage coach about twenty horsemen charged down upon us. Each man wore a flaming red shirt and had a plume of the same color in his hat. That is the way the Red Riders showed up in Denver, where we drove them from. I learned that they were headed this way, and that is why I wrote to headquarters at Washington for advice. The three men were probably the last to arrive, and they traveled under the guise of honest men."

"I see," said Wild. "I thought it was about time we had some more trouble around these diggings. Things have been going on altogether too smooth the past few weeks. Where did these Red Riders show up on the way over from Spondulicks?"

"Right at the fork of the roads. There is a place there that leads down from the flat top of the range right there, and I think they came right down from it."

"I know where the place is perfectly well," replied Young Wild West. "That range runs back for miles and it is a very wild place—almost unexplored, I will say, for I have

never been all over it myself. It is full of dangerous crevices and precipices are on every hand. If the Red Riders have taken the top of the range for their hangout they will have to be mighty careful or they will fall a mile or so downward and save us the trouble of using powder and lead on them."

"Probably some of them are acquainted with the lay of the land up there."

"That might be. There have been a few outlaws to escape death when the several bands that existed in these parts were broken up. There might be some of these among the Red Riders."

Wild now turned to the old man he had been talking to, who was no other than old Murdock, the grandfather of his sweetheart, pretty Arietta Murdock, the postmistress of Weston.

"Pop," said he, "this is Mr. Harper. He is going to stop with me over at the house for a while. Mr. Harper, Mr. Murdock, one of the old pioneers and Indian fighters of Fort Bridger."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Murdock," remarked Harry, shaking hands with the old veteran.

"Same to you, sir," was the reply.

Harper got his grip from the top of the stage coach a few minutes later, and then he walked over to the office with Young Wild West.

Jim Dart, Cheyenne Charlie, Jack Robedee and Dove-Eye Dave were there, and when Harry was introduced to them all he made up his mind that he had fallen among good people.

He also made a favorable impression upon them all, and when they learned his mission to Weston they really felt delighted.

"There's lively times ahead once more!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, as he stroked his handsome mustache with an air of satisfaction.

"Red Riders, eh?" mused Jim Dart, speaking half aloud. "Well, they are something new. The red shirts they wear will make it easy for us to pick them out."

"That's right, Jim!" exclaimed Jack Robedee. "It will be our duty to make them red shirts like seives if ther wearers of 'em don't behave themselves."

"They have shown themselves already," spoke up Wild. "They fired a volley at the stage coach when it came along this morning."

"That so?" asked all hands in a breath.

"Yes," and then the handsome young dead-shot and Prince of the Saddle told them what happened on the way from Spondulicks to Weston.

Harry Harper then told of the humorous side of the affair, and when they heard how the old woman had acted they all laughed.

Harper was just speaking about the quiet man, who had lost all he possessed when who should come up to the door of the office but the self-same individual!

"Can I speak to you a minute?" he asked, looking at Harper.

"Come on in!" cried out Wild in a friendly tone. "Come in! We want you to give us an idea of how the three robbers looked."

"I kin do that easy enough, since I was playin' cards with 'em," was the answer, as the man came in and sat down on a bench.

"Well, just tell us, then."

"Well, the leader of 'em was about his size," and he pointed to Cheyenne Charlie. "He had a black mustache an' chin whiskers, an' looked as though he might be a pretty tough man. He was mighty quick at drawin' a gun. The other two were about my size, only both of 'em were a little stouter. They had smooth faces an' were also mighty quick about gittin' their shooters out."

"But they wouldn't stay and face the music," observed Harper. "It took three of them to rob an old woman and one man. When they had done this they jumped out and ran for the cover of the rocks."

"That's it, exactly. Say! I followed you over here, because I thought maybe you'd see if you couldn't get me a job of something to do till I kin get enough to buy a set of tools to try my luck at minin'. I had over a hundred dollars, but they cleaned me out. They even took my pistol and my plug of tobacco!"

"We will start you in to work right after dinner," said Wild, when he had looked the man carefully over and reached the conclusion that he was an honest and inoffensive sort of a fellow. "We never go back on an honest man in this town."

"Thank you!" exclaimed the man, his eyes sparkling with delight.

"What might your name be, stranger?" inquired Cheyenne Charlie.

"John Sedgwick—Quiet John is ther nickname I went by on ther farm in Iowa. I've worked on a farm considerable, but my real trade is a bartender."

"Why don't you go over to ther Gazoo, or some of the other saloons an' ask for a job, then?" spoke up Jack Robedee. "You wouldn't have much trouble in strikin' a good job, if you are a real bartender."

"I am a first class bartender, but you see, I never 'tended bar in a wild place like this. I don't s'pose I've got nerve enough."

"Nonsense!" laughed Young Wild West, getting up and walking over the man. "Have you ever tried yourself to see how much nerve you had?"

"Well, no," was the hesitating reply.

"Well, suppose we try it now?"

"How are you going to?" and Quiet John shrugged his shoulders.

"Come on outside. I promise that you won't get hurt a particle, if you have any nerve at all."

"Well, I'll do my best. I can't do no more than that, kin I?"

"No. When a man does the best he can he is going his whole length, and that is all any one is expected to do in this country. Now, here is a ten-dollar gold piece. Take

it in your fingers this way and walk over by that big rock."

"You are goin' to shoot it out of my hand?"

"Yes, and if you find it after I shoot it's yours."

"All right, mister. I kin tell by the looks of you that you kin shoot straight."

Wild was pleased at the man's willingness. He had hardly expected that he would agree to the proposition, but since he had, he meant that he should have the gold coin after he had shot it from his fingers.

Quiet John walked over to the rock, which was about fifteen paces from the door of the office.

He held the coin up to plain view, and whipping out his revolver, Wild took a quick aim and fired.

As the shot rang out the ten-dollar gold piece flew from the man's fingers and struck the top of the rock with a ring.

"Thank you!" exclaimed the man, as he picked up the money and placed it in his pocket.

"I guess you have got nerve enough to be a bartender. Go over to the Gazoo and tell Brown I sent you there to get a job."

"Who will I say sent me?"

"Young Wild West."

"All right, sir. I'm ever so much obliged. If I get the job I'll do my level best at it."

"And you kin stake out a claim an' work on between times," added Jack Robedee. "You had better buy a shooter at ther supply store with that ten dollars. You might need it, you know, in your course of duty."

"All right. I'll take your advice. Thank you all, gentlemen! You have used me right, an' I won't forget you for it. Maybe I will have the chance to do something for you some day."

"I guess he will make out all right," remarked Harry Harper, as Sedgwick walked away. "He was little discouraged at losing all he had, I suppose. But now that he has got a little start, and knows that he has friends here, he will get along all right."

"If a man can't get along in Weston he can't nowhere else on ther face of ther earth!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "A hustler is bound to git rich here if he only sticks at it awhile."

"I guess that is true enough," replied Harper, as he looked over the town from where he stood. "I haven't seen a town of its size that can equal this one since I have been in the West."

Wild sent Jack over to the house to tell his Chinese cook that he must prepare food for one more until further notice, and then sat down and held a private conversation with Harper for about an hour.

By that time it was noon, and when Walter Jenkins, the

foreman of the company, came along he was introduced to the new arrival.

Both were very favorably impressed when the introduction had taken place, and after a few words of commonplace talk all hands went to dinner.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAWS AND THEIR HEADQUARTERS.

We will follow the three men who jumped out of the stage coach, after robbing the man and woman inside it.

When they darted behind the clump of rocks and narrowly missed being hit by the bullets fired at them by Harry Harper and the driver they seemed to be much elated.

"This is the place!" exclaimed the fellow with the black mustache and chin beard. "I know it is, because I have got it laid out in a regular map on paper. Now, I wonder where my men are?"

"If they are around anywhere the shootin' ought to bring 'em out," said one of the others. "Ah! here comes a lot of horses now!"

Sure enough, all at once there was a clattering of hoofs and the next moment the red-shirted band appeared. They came right down a steep, but rather short incline, and were about to halt when they saw the three men standing there.

"Go on out, boys, and give that stage coach a dose of lead, just to let them know that the Red Riders of the Range have showed up for business!"

The valley was fired with the result already known to the reader, and a little later the band came back.

"Welcome to Bold Blackburn, our gallant captain, boys!" cried the horseman in charge of the band. "Three cheers for Bold Blackburn, the captain of the Red Riders of the Range!"

The dark villain took off his broad-brimmed hat and bowed smilingly to the right and left.

"Thank you, boys! Now to the snug retreat you have prepared for me in our new hunting grounds. I have two new recruits, who must join our band in the regular way, though I vouch for them until they have passed the ordeal and taken the oath."

The Red Riders dismounted at a word from the man in charge, and then, leading their horses, they walked up the narrow pass to a more level spot.

Here a magnificent gray horse was found tied to a sapling, and without a word, Bold Blackburn ran to him and began to caress the animal.

It was his well trained horse, and the villain was glad to set eyes on him again, for at one time it had looked as though he would never be able to join his band, so hot upon his track were the minions of the law.

The horse knew him, too, and welcomed him as only an intelligent horse can.

"The other two will ride double with some of you," said the captain, as he vaulted into the saddle. "I guess we can make out all right."

This was soon settled by the two climbing up behind on two of the larger horses who had light men upon them.

Then, with his trusted lieutenant by his side to show him the way, Bold Blackburn rode at the head of his men for a hidden retreat on the ridge.

"How far is it, Weissert?" asked the captain of the man beside him, who was a scoundrel of German extraction with more scars upon his body than he had fingers and toes.

"Just two miles from the trail, captain," was the reply. "The way is dangerous to those who have never gone that way, but to those who have it is easy enough. You will see how easy it is."

The captain kept his eyes open, taking in his surroundings with a great degree of exactness as he passed through the wild country.

Now and then they were forced to pass around narrow turns at the edges of dangerous cliffs, and then, again, the way would be perfectly level and unobstructed.

After many turns the two miles were covered and the band of men were at the entrance to the cave that had been selected for a rendezvous.

"A fine place, Weissert," said Bold Blackburn, as he looked about him with a critical eye.

"Yes, cap, that's what I thought when we selected it the other day. It was a good thing that one of our men had been all around this part of the country before, or we would never have got here."

"There are just enough oaks, pines and rock crags to make it picturesque. How do we get into the cave? I must admit that I don't see anything that looks like one yet."

"That is the best part of it, cap. It could never be discovered, unless by accident. You see that big stump over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, now come on. We must go single file now."

Weissert rode ahead straight to the stump and rounded it, coming squarely before a narrow cleft in the rocks.

Right into this he rode and the next minute they were entirely out of the sunlight.

For perhaps fifty feet they rode along, and then the

leader emerged into a big cave which was lighted by means of a crooked split in the top through which the sun shone.

"Here we are, cap!" he exclaimed. "What think you of this place?"

"Excellent! It could not be beat!" was the reply, as he looked around and noticed several hollows on the side which answered for sleeping places for the men.

One end was used for a stable, and at the other a stream flowed across it and went dashing down the rocks through a split in the rock.

"It couldn't be better if it was made to order," said the captain of the Red Riders. "I congratulate you fellows on having such good choice in selecting a hiding place for our band."

"Glad to hear you talk that way, cap," retorted the lieutenant. "A compliment from the boss always makes the gang feel good, you know."

"I suppose so. Well, you know me well enough to feel quite sure that when I say a thing I mean it."

When Bold Blackburn had made a thorough examination of the place he came over to where the two new recruits were standing, and said:

"Well, I suppose you fellows are anxious to become full-fledged members of the gang?"

"That's it, cap," replied one of them. "We would like to git ther thing over with as soon as possible, an' then have a bite to eat."

"Ah, that reminds me that I am hungry, too. Hey, there, Weissert. How about something to eat?"

"Right away, cap," was the answer. "We've got venison an' grouse for dinner, an' plenty of ther grub, too. It won't take a great while to fix you up a meal fit for a king. There's plenty of good fresh corn bread an' coffee to go with it, too."

"That will just suit me. I don't care how soon you get it ready, either."

The outlaws hustled about and a fire was soon started.

They had stocked up pretty well with wood, so this was quite an easy thing to do.

It was not very long before the fragrant aroma of boiling coffee and the appetizing odor of venison and other game that was being broiled pervaded the atmosphere throughout the cave.

When the meal was at length ready the captain and the new recruits were the first to be served.

Bold Blackburn lighted his pipe after he had finished eating, and took a walk around the cave.

Pretty soon Weissert, his lieutenant, came up to him.

"The men are anxious to see the new ones take the test and the oath," he said.

"All right," was the reply. "We will attend to it at once, and have it over with. The two men are all right; I am positive of that, because I have tried them, and one of them I knew years ago."

"Oh, none of the men doubt that. You see, the initiation being a new thing, they are anxious to see how it looks when some one besides themselves goes through it."

Preparations were at once started to make the two villains who had accompanied the captain of the Red Riders on his journey to the new headquarters.

The first thing that was done was to blindfold the two men.

When this was done the captain gave a signal and the men gathered in a circle about the cave.

Then the man called Weissert stepped up to the blindfolded men and took them by the arms.

Bold Blackburn raised his hand and dropped it as quick as a flash again.

Instantly every man drew his revolver.

"Strangers," said the captain in a voice that was really solemn and impressive, "do you seek to belong to our band known as the Red Riders of the Range?"

"Yes," came the answer from both candidates.

"Are you willing to abide by our rules and regulations?"

"We are."

"Will you take an oath to that effect?"

"We will."

"Then repeat after me the following obligation."

The oath the villain administered to the two men was so horrible and full of blasphemy that we will not repeat it here.

Suffice it to say that the aspirants for outlaw honors took it willingly enough.

Then the captain called out:

"Ready!"

Instantly every red-shirted man in the place had his revolver levelled at the candidates.

Then off came the hoodwinks and they found themselves staring into the deadly tubes.

The effect was quite startling, but neither of the men so much as flinched a particle.

They were hardened scoundrels, and this was not the first time they had a number of revolvers pointed at them.

The other occasions had been in dead earnest, and as they had come out alive that was proof that they were made of the kind of stuff that was needed to make an ideal outlaw.

But this was not all they had to go through, though they no doubt thought it was.

Two of the Red Riders suddenly retired from view, leaving the rest still covering the men with their revolvers.

Before being blindfolded the candidates had been obliged to give up all their weapons, and the lieutenant now stepped forward and handed them each a revolver.

They took them, wondering what was coming next, since the weapons were not their own.

"Gentlemen," said Bold Blackburn, "do you remember that you promised in your obligation to shoot any one whom you knew to be a traitor to our band?"

They said they remembered, and he continued:

"My lieutenant has informed me that we have a traitor here in the cave. He was caught in the act of robbing us and was all ready to sneak away and inform on us. What should be done with such a man?"

"Shoot him!" growled the men in unison.

"That is right," nodded the captain. "He shall be shot at once. Fetch him out, men!"

The next instant there was the sounds of a great rumpus in the back part of the cave and a struggling man, who was bound hand and foot, was dragged out in front of the candidates.

His shirt had been torn from him, and there were blood marks on his face and hands.

He began howling piteously, and struggling to get free.

"Don't kill me," he pleaded. "I'll be your servant as long as I live an' never go away from ther cave, if you'll only spare my life."

"Such a hound as you are can't be trusted," replied Bold Blackburn, coldly. "You have got to die, so brace up and take your medicine! You snivelling coward, you! You would have had us run out of here by a troop of soldiers, would you? I don't see how my trusted men could keep from killing you before I got here."

The two men, who were now standing in the center of a circle, looked at the pleading wretch, but there was not the least gleam of pity in their eyes.

The captain looked pleased when he saw this.

"Men of the Red Riders of the Range," he said, "before we proceed any farther I want to introduce you to our new members. Bob Burgess and Stitch Sprague, shake hands with every man who wears a red shirt!"

They obeyed, wondering as they did so why it was that each man pressed the muzzle of his revolver against their temples as he grasped their hands.

"Now, then, boys, since they have been introduced, what is the next thing required of them?"

"They must shoot the cowardly traitor!" was the unanimous reply.

"Aye, that is it; they must shoot him, so that he may die the death that he deserves. Stand the coward up against the wall, and we will have it over with at once!"

The fellow howled piteously when he was seized and braced against the wall, but not one of the villains paid the least attention to his cries.

"Bob Burgess and Stitch Sprague, you have my word for it that this man is a traitor. Step forward and do your duty!"

A deathly silence followed the words, but only for the space of a second.

Then the two new members stepped forward a few feet and began firing at the helpless form.

At the first two shots the man rolled over upon the floor with a groan, but they did not desist till the chambers of their revolvers were emptied.

Then a hoarse murmur of applause went up from the assembled outlaws, which told the villains that they had done well.

Weissert took them by the arms and led them to the other end of the cave.

The thought they had put the finishing touches to a traitor, but they had not.

The man they had shot at was not a traitor, but had simply been acting his part in the regular initiation.

The revolvers had been loaded with powder alone!

The fellow who had acted the part so well, got up with a pleased grin, and as soon as one of his companions had cut his bonds he went over to a tub of water and washed himself, after which he put on his red shirt and mingled with the rest.

Bold Blackburn, with seemingly great pride, called them over and said:

"Boys, allow me to introduce you to Pep Simonson, the man you just shot!"

The two men looked at each other a moment, and then, to use the expression, took a tumble.

But the whole thing had been very real to them, and they did not hesitate to say so.

"Well, the initiation is all over now," observed the captain, "but I want to tell you one thing, and that is that if you had not shot the supposed traitor when I told you to do so, we would have shot you both in your tracks! We have no use for men who take pity on traitors or enemies to our band."

"That's right," retorted Burgess.

"Of course it is," chimed in Sprague.

"Well, now that it is all over, and we understand each other thoroughly. I am going to take a little nap. I am tired out from my long journey, and after I get a little rest I may take it my head to take a ride out to-night and learn something about this part of the country. Weissert, be

sure that there is always a man on guard who can keep his eyes open. This applies to now and all the time."

"You kin depend on me to see to that, cap." was the reply.

This much having been told of the Red Riders of the Range and their hidden headquarters, it will be seen that Young Wild West and the detective had no easy task ahead of them.

There was bound to be lots of hot and dangerous work before the outlaws would be driven from that section, and there would be plenty of fighting and strategy needed to accomplish it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVE GETS ACQUAINTED.

"It strikes me," said Young Wild West, as he was seated on quite a comfortable bench which had been made of a big mountain pine that had been felled close to the front of the house he had taken up his residence in ever since it had been built, "it strikes me that we had better wait a day or two before we make any straight move to hunt out this gang who wear red shirts and red plumes in their hats. I have an idea that some of them will be paying a visit here before they have been in the vicinity very long. If they are nervy enough to ride about in a rig on purpose to let people know who they are, they will surely be nervy enough to come in town."

"I rather think you are right on that point," answered Harry Harper, who was seated beside him, smoking one of the best cigars that could be bought in Weston.

It was the evening following the arrival at Weston of the government detective, and he and Young Wild West were enjoying a quiet little smoke all by themselves.

"Suppose we take a walk around town?" said Harry. "I want to get acquainted with some of the people. You might introduce me as a friend of yours from the East."

"All right," replied Wild. "We will take in all the places. Jack Robedee has gone over to Devil Creek for a day or two, so he can be close to a widow he is in love with; Cheyenne Charlie is home with his wife, and Jim Dart is courting his girl. I guess you and I will make the rounds without the company of any one else. Have your shooters ready for business, for there are so many strangers coming in town now that there is liable to be an interruption at any time. A great many of them take me for a boy, and try to have some fun with me, even after I am introduced, you

know. Besides, some of them might think you are a tenderfoot, and then, if the ones who think so happen to be drunk they will probably try to make you dance for their amusement, or something like that."

Harper smiled at this.

"I have been taken for a tenderfoot several times," he said. "Over in Denver I got into the worst muss I was ever in, just because I objected to having a big fellow pour a glass of whiskey down the back of my neck."

"Had to shoot him full of holes to learn him manners, I suppose?"

"Yes, after I knocked him down with my fist he shot at me a couple of times, and for fear that he might accidentally hit me, I gave him one that settled him."

"That is the only way to do it, but I suppose your people in the East would be horrified at anything like that?"

"Yes, the majority of them would never get used to the ways of the Wild West."

"Well," said Wild, "we are doing our best to tame it so it will be a fit place for those who live in the crowded cities of the East to come and live some time."

"That's right."

It was now getting dusk, so the two arose from the improvised bench and started for the heart of the town.

Wild had a way of going into Brown's Gazoo first when he took a stroll about town.

Though he ran a full-fledged gambling house, Brown was a pretty fair fellow.

He had the greatest respect for Young Wild West and always used him right.

It was Monday night and a great many of the miners did not work that day, but wound up the sprees they started on Saturday night.

As they neared the Gazoo they noticed that a fight was in progress.

A couple of shots were fired, but by the time they got there it was all over, with no one hurt.

The two belligerents seemed to be satisfied after each had fired a shot, and as they had always been friends and it was only a drunken quarrel, no one did anything to keep them going.

Young Wild West led the way into the barroom behind the two miners, who had agreed to have a drink and call it square.

There were no strangers in the place, so nothing was said that was anywhere wrong concerning the city dressed man with him.

The two lingered there for a few minutes, and then started for the next place.

"I should like to try my luck at faro for about fifteen minutes, if you don't mind," remarked Harper, as he noticed the sign over the door as they entered the place.

"Ever have any luck at the game?" Wild asked.

"No, but I can't say that I have ever lost anything."

"Well, I don't recommend it as a game for any one to play, but seeing that you are interested in it, I will go in with you and take a turn with you, if you will agree to stop when I say the word."

"I will do that," replied the detective. "The moment you say the word I'll stop."

"Good. Come on, then."

The two walked through the barroom and were soon in the apartment where the "lay out" was.

There was quite a crowd in there, but there was plenty of chance for new players, for all that.

One of them seemed to be in a great streak of luck, and, as Harper looked at him, he saw it was his friend. Shep Morey, the stage coach driver.

"How are you making out, Shep?" he asked.

"Hello, Mr. Harper! Oh! I'm makin' out putty good," was the reply. "Why don't you try your luck?"

"I was just thinking about it. I guess I'll watch you for a while, and then if I think there is any show for me, I'll try the game."

He did watch the game for a few minutes, and then seeing that the driver had won at least a hundred dollars since he had been looking at him play, he took a hand himself.

Young Wild West did not take a hand just then. He simply wanted to watch the detective play, knowing full well that he had plenty of money at his disposal and that he could afford to lose some of it.

Harry placed his first bet on the nine of hearts.

Much to his satisfaction, he won.

It was only a small bet, though, and the next time he doubled it, this time backing the king of spades.

Again he won.

Shep, the driver, had lost on both deals since Harper came in the game, and at the next deal he waited to see what the new player was going to bet on before he said anything.

"A hundred dollars on the ace of diamonds," said Harry, not knowing just why he was betting on that particular card.

He was plainly a novice in the game, and was playing it more for amusement than anything else.

"Five hundred on ther same card," called out Shep. "I'll play ther ace of diamonds, too."

The dealer threw out the card in his usual easy-going way.

Up came the ace of diamonds!

"I'm glad you come in, Mr. Harper," said Shep.

"So am I," was the reply.

"Won't you try your luck, Mr. West?" asked the dealer with a bland smile. "I reckon that you are considerable ahead of the game."

"If I am, I want to stay that way," answered Wild; "but since you would like to see me play, why, I will take a hand. It strikes me that the ace of diamonds is due to turn up again, and I will place just five hundred dollars on it."

The dealer got just the least bit uneasy as Wild counted out the money.

He had seen him play before, and he had never seen him lose.

The young scout made the bet not because he really felt it was a sure thing that the card was going to turn up, but just to get the dealer rattled.

Then he depended on the luck that usually followed him to win.

The cards were dealt, and sure enough, the ace of diamonds came up again.

Both Harper and Shep had put money on the same card, and they raked in their winnings full of glee.

"Now," said Wild, "I am going to try it just once more. Toss out the pasteboards."

The cards were dealt and then he placed five hundred on the jack of hearts.

Harry and Shep also bet on that card.

But it failed to turn up.

"I am just even on the two deals," observed Young Wild West, loud enough for every one in the room to hear him. "Now, as I haven't the time to play any more just now, I am going to quit. Come on, Harry."

"All right," answered the detective, who was a few dollars ahead. "I am through."

"I ain't, not by a jugful!" cried Shep Morey. "I am goin' to break ther bank, or let it break me."

"See here, Morey," said Wild, taking him by the arm; "I'll just lay you two hundred dollars that the bank breaks you inside of half an hour."

"I'll take that bet, Young Wild West," was the quick reply. "Here's the money right in Mr. Harper's hands."

Wild quietly covered the money, and then left the place, followed by the detective.

They took in every place there was in town after that, but nothing exciting happened, and at length they went home.

The next morning, shortly after breakfast, who should come along past the office but Shep Morey.

He was going to walk right past the office without saying a word, but Wild called him.

"What's the matter, Shep?" asked he. "Ain't you going to stop? I thought when I saw you coming that you was after the money we bet last night."

"No, I ain't after ther money," was the retort. "It's yours, for I went broke in less than fifteen minutes after you left last night."

"Then you haven't got enough to take us over to the Gazoo and treat us this morning?"

"No. I ain't got a cent. I'll manage to make out somehow, though, till I git over to Spondulicks this afternoon an' see ther boss."

"Come here, Shep. I am going to give you your money back. I was only fooling with you last night when I bet with you. I was quite sure that you would lose all you had if you stuck to the game, and I could see that you meant to do that. I bet you just so you would have some money this morning. Here's your two hundred dollars. Now, then, be careful how you bet, and also don't bother the faro banks too much. There's lots of money in faro banks, but you can rest assured that there's none there for you."

The man did not want to take it, but Wild insisted on it, and he finally did.

"Now I'll take you over an' stand treat for anything you want," he said.

"Much obliged, but I don't drink anything strong myself, and I guess Mr. Harper don't care for anything so early in the morning."

"That's right," chimed in the detective.

"Oh! Well, some other time maybe you will take a smoke or something with me," and Shep walked away, apparently more than pleased at getting his money back.

"I bet that will be a lesson to him," observed the detective.

"I meant it to be," replied Wild. "A great many people become so infatuated with gambling that it ruins them entirely. For my part, I never allowed myself to become carried away with it, though I have done considerable of it, and know about every gambling game that is going."

"I must say that what you have just said has done me a whole lot of good. Though, as I said before, I have never lost anything at the game, I have always been more or less fascinated by it. I shan't gamble any more."

Young Wild West smiled softly to himself.

Somehow, he was always sowing seeds of goodness, and he began to wonder why it was that he had such a power over the people he knew.

All that day both Wild and Harper were on the lookout for new arrivals, but it was not until sunset that they noticed any one who seemed at all suspicious.

Two men came in mounted on fine horses, which, by the looks of them, had not been ridden very far.

This alone was enough to make our hero feel a trifle suspicious, but when he noticed the jaunty, independent air of the riders he was sure they were of the kind who make trouble.

They might have been taken for wealthy cattle owners or gamblers, for there was a certain sporty appearance about them that could not be denied.

Both men wore their hair long and had smooth faces.

Young Wild West was standing in front of the post office talking to Arietta Murdock, and Harry Harper was at the Gazoo when the strangers rode in.

When Wild saw them dismount and hitch their horses to the tree at the corner of the Gazoo Hotel, he made some excuse to the pretty postmistress and walked leisurely over.

He was just in time to hear a voice exclaim:

"Step up, everybody, and have a drink! I am Doc Dempsey, the cattle raiser of Nebraska, and I am making a tour of the country with my right bower, Stitch Sprague, the champion lariat slinger of the West! Everybody drink now, and be sociable."

Old Brown and his new bartender, John Sedgwick, were hustling to get the drinks on the bar when Wild stepped in.

Brown was a shrewd man. It made no difference to him whether the strangers were what they represented themselves to be or not; he had reason to believe that they had lots of money, and that was what he was after.

"Hello, Young Wild West!" cried the new bartender in a tone that showed how glad he was to see the young fellow who had got the job for him.

At this the stranger who had been doing the talking turned and gave Wild an insolent stare.

CHAPTER V.

WILD AND THE DETECTIVE RIDE UP THE MOUNTAIN.

"Come, boy, you are just in time," said the man who called himself Doc Dempsey, the cattle king. "Have a drink of benzine with us!"

"I am much obliged to you, but I never touch it," replied the boy very civilly.

"What! Don't touch whiskey, eh? What in thunder are you rigged up in imitation of a sporting ranch owner for then?"

A hush came over the crowd as this question was asked,

for nearly every man present was acquainted with Young Wild West, and they knew he would take no fooling from the stranger, who seemed to possess such a loud mouth.

"No, I never touch whiskey," repeated Wild quietly.

Harry Harper shifted his position uneasily.

He had not been acquainted with Young Wild West but a few hours, but he had known him long enough to feel quite certain that there was going to be trouble right away.

The cool, easy way the boy had, when others would have begun to show their anger, showed just how dangerous he was.

Brown must have realized, too, what was coming, for he began taking his bottles from the shelves and placing them under the bar.

Doc Dempsey looked at Wild for a moment and mistook the calm expression on his face for one of fear.

"By ginger!" he exclaimed. "A dandy looking chap like you are ought to drink whiskey. Why, if you had the nerve you would make a regular fighter."

"That is only your opinion of me," was the calm reply. "Most men like to drink whiskey, but I don't. As I said before, I never touch it, and I never mean to, so long as I have my right senses. I have seen more than one good man go to his death all on account of whiskey."

"No doubt you have, my boy. It may be that you will kick the bucket yourself some day on account of whiskey. Just suppose that I should hand you a glass of whiskey and tell you that unless you drank it I would put a streak of lead through you; what would you do?"

"I wouldn't drink it," and with these words Wild walked away, as though he did not want to talk any further about it.

"Give us another drink—all around, landlord!" cried Dempsey. "A small one for the boy. I guess I will be able to induce him to drink it."

Wild now walked out of the door and stood against one of the posts that held up the shed in front of the shanty hotel.

Brown breathed a sigh of relief, for he knew now that the shooting would take place outside, for he was sure that the bullets would begin to fly shortly.

The detective was about to follow his young friend out when Dempsey pushed his way to the door ahead of him.

The so-called cattle king, who was so full of braggadocio, had a glass of whiskey in one hand and a revolver in the other when he went out of the door.

Probably he only meant to have a little fun with the boy, but that sort of fun did not go with Young Wild West.

"See here, What's-your-name," he said. "I've been good enough to bring your whiskey out to you; now I want you to drink it."

He held the glass above his head, evidently to show how tempting it looked, and, quick as a flash, Wild whipped out his revolver and shot it from his hand.

The whiskey and some of the broken glass flew into the man's face, temporarily blinding him and taking him completely by surprise.

"Furies!" he cried, dancing about like a wild man and wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his coat.

In about a second he was able to see, and with a leap that would have done credit to a panther, he darted for Wild.

But his gaze met the muzzle of a revolver, and a calm, smiling face behind it, and he stopped still in his tracks.

"Who in blazes are you?" he asked, nervously fingering the revolver he had in his hand.

"I am Young Wild West, at your service," was the reply.

"I heard some one call you that when you went into the bar; but who in blazes is Young Wild West?"

"I am! Is there anything further that I can do for you, Mr. Cattle King?"

"Yes," was the quick retort. "I would like to see you shoot another glass of whiskey out of my hand."

"Go and get one and I will oblige you."

"Do you mean that, Young Wild West?"

"I do. I never offer to do a thing that I am not ready to do. You get the glass of whiskey, and I will shoot it out of your hand. You talk as though you did not see me when I did it before."

"Well, I might as well admit that I didn't see how it was done. But, young man, if you try it again, look out for one of your ears! I might shoot one of them off for you."

"Don't worry about me. Just be on the lookout yourself. I'll guarantee that if one of my ears gets shot off by you it will be the last time you will ever press the trigger of a shooter. You opened up this game, and I want you to distinctly understand that I am ready to see it through to the finish."

"I like to hear you talk that way," and there was a confident smile on the face of Doc Dempsey as he said it. There was not the least doubt that he possessed plenty of grit.

The man Dempsey had introduced as his right bower, had come out with the rest of the men.

The expression on his face showed plainly that he would like to send a bullet through the heart of Young Wild West, but he knew that if he so much as pulled his revolver he would drop in short order.

He could tell by the looks of the men that the sympathy was with the boy.

Though the so-called cattle king had shown signs of be-

ing excitable at the start, he was now as cool as a cucumber, apparently.

"Whenever you are ready I am," remarked Young Wild West, still keeping his man covered.

"All right," was the reply. "Landlord, just fetch me another glass of whiskey."

Brown did not wait to be told twice.

He went in after the drink just as though it was an order from a customer who wanted to drink it, instead of holding it up to be shot at.

The glass, which was one of the thick, clumsy sort in use in that part of the country, was soon brought out.

Dempsey took it and was just in the act of raising it above his head when Young Wild West's revolver cracked twice in rapid succession.

The first shot shattered the glass into a hundred pieces and the second hit the revolver Dempsey had and knocked it from his hand!

The man was as much astounded as he had been the first time.

Neither of his hands had been touched by the bullets, but both glass and pistol had been shot from them.

"Are you satisfied?" questioned Wild. "Don't eye that shooter on the ground. It belongs to you, I know, but if you make a move to pick it up till I tell you to, I'll drop you dead in your tracks! Now, then, I ask you again, are you satisfied?"

"Yes," was the rather meek reply.

"Then pick up your shooter and come in and have a smoke with me. I am going to smoke myself, but you can take whiskey if you want to."

Doc Dempsey picked up the revolver and placed it in the holster without another word.

Then he went inside with the crowd and took his whiskey straight.

Wild paid for the drinks and the cigars, and then said to the detective, who had been taking in the scene with a great deal of admiration:

"Shall we go now, Harry?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I guess the excitement is all over."

As soon as they were outside, he added in a whisper to Wild:

"That fellow has a wig on. That long hair is not his own."

"I am of the same opinion."

"You are? I did not think you noticed such things."

"Oh! I notice most everything that's going on. I have to, you know. Suppose I had not noticed that Doc Demp-

sey had his revolver ready to bore me the moment I fired at the glass?"

"Well, that is a little different. But throwing all jokes aside, don't you think that those two men might belong to the Red Riders?"

"I wouldn't be the least surprised if they did. If they are, Dempsey, as he calls himself, must be the leader. He has come in town just to hunt up some information. A fellow can stand around and learn a whole lot, you know."

"Yes, an idea could be got of how much the mail that goes out to-morrow is worth. Some of the miners have a way of telling everything they know. Just before you came in the Gazoo a fellow was telling how he was sending two hundred dollars to his wife, so she could come on from Ohio. Now, suppose the Red Riders should get hold of that? They might think it worth holding up the stage coach."

"As sure as you live. That much, with what they could get out of the passengers, would make it pay them handsomely."

"Well, Wild, I am ready to take a little ride on the mountain to-night. What do you say?"

"It will just suit me," was the reply. "My little experience with Doc Dempsey just now has got me in the humor for something livelier. Only just you and I will go."

"Yes, that will be enough for to-night. We may be able to find out pretty near where the band is located before we get back. I suppose I can borrow a horse from one of your partners?"

"Certainly. You can take Jim's. He is so busy courting his girl that I am sure he won't want to use him to-night; and if he does he can borrow some one else's."

This part of it being settled, the two walked over to the stable in the rear of the office and found a man who was employed to keep a watch there every night playing cards with a friend.

He was a man who could always be trusted, and Wild knew it. Otherwise he would not have got the job.

Wild's handsome sorrel stallion, Spitfire, was too valuable a beast to be left in any stable without a guard.

Besides this, Wild valued him more than ten times his real worth, on account of the many times the intelligent steed had saved his life.

The friend the night watchman was playing cards with proved to be Ike, the colored man who had been hired by Wild and his companions to do the outside work around the house.

The darky thought Wild was not pleased at seeing him there and made ready to get out.

"That's all right," said his boss. "I don't mind if you sit up all night and play cards, so long as you do the work

you are hired to do in the day time. You must always remember one thing, though, and that is that I allow my watchman no whiskey during the night. Ike, if I was to catch you bringing any here I would discharge you on the spot."

"I know dat, Marsa Wild. I done bring no whiskey here but dat what I had for to drink ober at de Gazoo after supper."

"So you did bring some home with you, after all, then?"

"Yes, sah, but it done be inside ob me."

"Well, you musn't bring too much of it around here inside of you, either. Just remember that."

"Oh! Ise neber drink any more den a quart in one day, sah! Ise knows enough for dat."

This caused both Wild and Harry to laugh.

Then they set at it and soon had the two horses saddled and bridled, ready to start.

Instead of being fractious and inclined to kick, Wild's horse was as gentle as a kitten when he buckled the girths about him.

He knew the very step of his master, and it is safe to say that he would not have acted so gentle if it had been any one else who had come to take him out.

Two minutes later Young Wild West and the detective were riding up the trail that ran around the side of the mountain.

"We will ride along till we come to the junction of the roads, then go it a little cautious," remarked Harry.

"That's it. Now, remember, I am out with you, and I expect to act under your instructions."

"That is not what I got you to help me in this business for; I expect to be advised by you. You know more about hunting down outlaws than I ever dreamed of."

"Well, I shan't give you any advice unless I think it necessary. I promise you that."

"All right. Say! it is clouding up, isn't it? I guess it is going to rain."

"It does look that way. Well, so much the better. We are not so apt to be seen by the men we are looking for if there is a storm in progress. I have been on the mountains in more than one storm, and I have generally had pretty good luck on such occasions, especially if I was out for business."

Our friends allowed their horses to proceed at an easy canter up the long, winding slope, but when the way became more level they urged them forward at a faster gait.

The stars disappeared one by one and soon it became as dark as a pocket.

Just as they reached the close vicinity of the forks of the road a light rain began to fall.

They allowed the horses to walk on till the fork was reached, and then Wild called a halt.

"I think it would be a good idea to stop under the shelving cliff over there for a few minutes," he said. "If those two men are really members of the Red Riders I think it most likely that they have started for their hangout before this. We might wait here awhile, and if we do not gain anything else by it, we will keep from getting soaked to the skin."

"You are right. We will do as you suggest," replied the detective, acting as though he was going to allow Young Wild West to run the business that night.

The rain began to increase as soon as they got under the shelter, and, dismounting, they prepared to wait awhile.

They had not been there more than five minutes when they heard the rumble of wheels and the clatter of hoofs.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE DISAPPEARS.

"What's that coming?" asked the detective in surprise. Young Wild West shook his head.

"I can't say," replied he. "It sounds like the rumbling of a stage coach, but there is none due this way now, and I don't know what it is."

"Sounds like a whole lot of stage coaches coming together."

"Yes. It must be a wagon train bound for Weston. We will know in a minute. Whoever they are, they are hurrying for shelter."

Wild was exactly right on this. The next minute a flashing lantern came in view, and by its light our two friends could see that there were more than one old-fashioned prairie schooner coming down the trail as fast as the oxen hitched to them could be made to travel. There were also about a dozen men on horseback, and these were doing their best to hurry along the oxen.

As the wagon train drew nearer they could see that there were five of the covered wagons, all told.

Young Wild West had just made up his mind to call out to them when something entirely unexpected took place.

A volley of rifle shots rang out and two or three of the men riding beside the wagons fell from the saddle.

Then through the darkness came a score or more of horsemen, firing their revolvers as they came.

As dark as it was Wild and the detective could see that

the men making the attack wore red shirts and had plumes of the same color in their hats.

"The Red Riders!" gasped Harper.

"Yes," nodded Wild, grimly, as he quickly unslung his rifle and began firing into the band of villains.

Though taken completely by surprise, the men belonging to the wagon train quickly recovered themselves and opened fire on the intruders.

But the Red Riders did not intend to stay there and fight it out; they rode on by with the speed of the wind and got out of range around a bend in the trail.

Two riderless horses went with them, leaving one dead and one wounded man behind them.

Wild knew he was responsible for one of the men, but he did not say so just then.

The wagon train had come to a sudden halt now, and calling to the men, so they would not be mistaken for outlaws, Young Wild West and Harper stepped into view.

"Get ready for them!" he shouted. "They will be back again."

"That's jest what I'm thinkin'," replied one of the men, who was evidently the leader. "How many are there of ye?"

"Only two, but I rather think that gang of red shirts will think there are half a dozen of us before we get through with them," answered Wild. "Line your wagons up within about ten feet of the bluff here, and then come behind them. We gave it to them a little better than they expected, I guess, but they will be back for more."

"I'll be hanged if it ain't Young Wild West who is talkin'!" exclaimed a voice, and then an old scout whom our hero had met over in Spondulicks, ran up to him and shook his hand.

"Yes, it is me, Jake," was the reply. "Hurry up, now, and get the women and children protected. I see you have some with you."

"About twenty of 'em, I reckon," was the rejoinder. "Now, boys, git a move on yer! We've got Young Wild West to help us out, an' we'll simply make things hum if that gang comes back."

He had scarcely ceased speaking when a volley was fired at them from the darkness of the pass.

Fortunately no one was hit, and the fire was returned with interest.

The Red Riders retreated immediately, showing that they did not intend to make an open fight of it.

A few scattering shots were fired after that and then all was still.

"What is your loss?" asked Wild, after five minutes had passed and the villains did not renew the attack.

"Two dead an' four wounded," replied the boss of the train. "This are what I call a shame! Here we have traveled all the way from Nebrasky without losin' a man, though we was tackled by Injuns three times. We ain't more than seven or eight miles from Weston, an' here we have to go an' be attacked by a gang of white outlaws an' lose two of our men."

"What has been done can't be helped," said Wild. "But we will see to it that you don't lose any more."

The men had formed a pretty good barricade with the wagons by this time, but it was a needless precaution, as the outlaws had got more than they bargained for, and did not propose to bother them any more that night.

After waiting a little while Wild turned to Harry, and said:

"You and I will go on a little scout and see if we can learn what the scoundrels are up to."

"Agreed!" was the reply.

Telling the wagon train people to take care of their horses till they got back, our two friends crept out and stole softly away in the darkness.

Wild was much pleased at the caution Harper used in moving along.

"You would make a pretty good scout," he whispered.

"My profession has taught me to be cautious in every move I make when I am on a trail," was the reply.

"I am glad you are that way, for we don't want to make the least noise when we get up here a little further."

When the Red Riders had charged upon the emigrant train they came from the Spondulicks fork of the road, and when they appeared the second time they merely rounded the point to the one that led to the prairie beyond.

It was toward this point of towering, jagged rocks that our two friends were slowly making their way.

Wild was sure that they had a hangout, the outlet of which was somewhere around that spot.

Now, the thing to do was to find it!

Revolvers in their hands and ready for a surprise, the two crept on.

The rain was still falling, but not very fast.

It was one of those drizzling storms that had set in—the kind that sometimes last for two or three days with no more water to fall than would come down in a heavy shower of an hour or two.

The night just suited their purpose, however, and with a feeling of confidence, Wild led the way.

In less than two minutes after leaving the wagons they had reached the point that divided the road.

There was nothing there but a steep slab of rock, so after

listening for perhaps a full minute, they started slowly to the right.

They proceeded in this direction for about fifty feet, but found nothing to indicate that there was an opening or any way to ascend.

Then Wild touched his companion on the arm and made a motion that they would go back and try the other way.

Harper understood him readily, so back they went.

The detective was in the lead this time, and when they had reached the point he crept around to the left, Wild not being more than four feet behind him.

Two seconds later Young Wild West heard a noise made by falling pebbles and bits of loosened earth, and then as he looked around the angle he found that his companion had disappeared!

Puzzled and very much surprised, Wild crouched down flat upon his stomach.

What could it mean?

But only once did he ask himself this question. He quickly realized that their enemies were pursuing very shrewd tactics.

That they could capture the detective without him making the least outcry showed that they were well up in their business.

The brave young scout was sure that they had captured him. If they had used a knife on him there would surely have been as much as a gurgling groan to reach his ears.

And then, again, if that had happened where was the body?

Wild was doing some rapid thinking just then.

"It might be that he has tumbled into a hole," he muttered under his breath. "But I should have heard him when he struck the bottom, unless—unless the bottom is too far down."

Wild shrugged his shoulders uneasily at this thought.

There was only one thing for him to do and that was to remain perfectly still and listen.

This he did, and the next instant he heard the sounds made by receding footsteps.

The boy breathed a sigh of relief.

Somehow he now felt confident that Harper was alive.

With his left hand feeling in advance of him, Wild started to crawl around the point of rock.

He was going right upon the very spot that his companion had disappeared from.

But if there was any sort of pitfall there he would know it in time to prevent himself from falling into it.

He was half way around when he suddenly heard low voices quite near him.

Young Wild West had a keen sense of hearing.

That had been demonstrated on more than one occasion.

He crouched low and listened.

"Us two will stay here and wait till the captain and the other man comes back," he heard a man say. "The rest of you can go on up."

"It won't do to bother that wagon train agin; they are ready for us, and there are too many of 'em. We couldn't beat 'em without losin' some more men, anyhow, and that wouldn't pay us."

"That's right," was the reply. "But didn't we catch this feller in a neat way! Why, he crawled right to our wery feet, an' he didn't see us till we had grabbed him an' lifted him up, with one of my hands over his mouth an' the other holdin' tight to his throat."

"It was done pretty nice, but we needn't have been so mild about it. He was too far away from the wagon train to hear what was goin' on; and if he had yelled out we could have mowed 'em down in no time if they had come in here after us."

"He must be a nervy chap, or he wouldn't have come sneakin' along to find out where we was."

"Yes, and he looks like a regular tenderfoot, too. If I had my way about it he would have a knife stuck through his heart before this, but it is the captain's orders never to kill a prisoner we take while he is away till he sees him and has a talk with him."

"I know that. Well, we will go on up to ther cave, an' you an' Bill can stay here an' wait for ther captain."

Wild caught every word of this, for the voices of the men arose slightly as they continued their talk.

The daring young dead-shot of the West was now perfectly at his ease.

It did not worry him greatly about the detective being a prisoner in the hands of the outlaws.

One thing was certain, Harper would not be put to death till the captain arrived.

And suppose he never did arrive!

The shadow of a smile crossed the countenance of Wild as he thought this.

"Well, I know pretty well who the captain and the 'other fellow' is," he murmured to himself. "They are the pair of strangers we met at the Gazoo. Now, then, I must do something, but I will wait till the gang who are bound for the cave get out of hearing, for there is no telling what might happen."

A minute or two later he heard a number of horses making their way over the stony ground.

He waited until they had entirely died out in the distance and then silently arose to his feet.

At that instant he heard the sound of approaching hoofs.

Whoever it was they were coming from the direction of Weston.

"The outlaw captain and the 'other fellow!' " he exclaimed under his breath. "Now is my chance!"

As quick as a flash he darted for the wagon train.

The horsemen would have to pass the men gathered there, and Wild wanted to get there ahead of them.

He got there just as two horsemen, noticing the lighted lanterns, slowed down.

"Aha! a wagon train! What's the trouble, men?" he heard the voice of Doc Dempsey say.

Then Young Wild West cried out through the darkness:

"Halt! Hold up your hands, or you are dead men!"

Taken completely by surprise and not knowing what sort of a trap they had run into, the two men obeyed.

A dozen men sprang from the cover of the wagons and surrounded them in short order.

"What means this? I took you to be honest men!" cried Dempsey with an affected air of surprise.

"That is just what we are," retorted Young Wild West.

"You are not mistaken the least bit. Now, then, dismount, and be quick about it, or my revolver will begin to talk. I will not be knocking whiskey from your hand, either."

"So it is Young Wild West who is speaking, is it?" said Dempsey, with remarkable coolness. "Of course we will obey his command, then."

Wild laughed tantalizingly.

"You are extremely polite, captain," he remarked, as the two riders dismounted. "Friends, just take their weapons from them and tie their hands so they will not be apt to get them loose in a hurry."

The words were no sooner out of the boy's mouth when the men proceeded to obey the command.

"I protest against this treatment, gentlemen," exclaimed Doc Dempsey in a tone of voice that showed he was a little alarmed.

"Protest and be hanged!" answered the scout who had recognized Wild when he rode up and helped fight off the outlaws. "If you are honest men you will be given a chance to prove it. If Young Wild West says tie you up, tie you up it is."

Wild saw to it himself that the two prisoners were securely bound, and then, turning to the man in command of the train, said:

"Travel right on for Weston now. It is not so far as you thought. Take the prisoners to the lock-up as soon as you get into town, and tell them that it is my orders that they should be guarded closely till I return. I must go and look for my friend, Harper, and I may not get back to Weston before daylight."

"All right, Mr. West; we'll do exactly as you say," was the response. "Git ready to move, boys."

They were ready, since the oxen were still hitched to the wagons, so in less than two minutes' time they were moving.

Wild took his own horse and the one Harper had ridden there and led them to a point down the trail and left them in a little grass-covered nook.

He knew that they would be found when wanted, as both had been trained pretty well to know what their masters required of them.

"Now, I am going to try and find where the hangout of the Red Riders is," he muttered. "I suppose the two men who were waiting for the return of the captain and the other man are all at sea as to what has happened, but I'll enlighten them a bit before very long. I'll just sneak around and see what they are doing."

The young scout knew of a winding path along the bluff on the side of the road opposite to where the two men were in waiting, and mounting the slanting rocks, he soon reached it.

There was a feeling of "do or die" in the boy's breast as he made his way along.

He had taken a strong liking to the detective who had come to enlist his services in hunting down the Red Riders of the Range, and he meant to rescue him before day broke, if there was a possible way to do it.

He soon got well past the point where the road divided, and he then began to look for a place to get down.

He found one a little farther on and cautiously descended. The rain was still falling, but so lightly that it was not much more than a mist.

He was pretty well wet through by this time, but he was used to that and did not think anything about it.

So long as his cartridges kept dry he did not care.

Using all his caution, he began to work his way to the place where Harper had been captured.

In a little while he got there.

Though he had an idea that the two men he had heard talking were not so smart as he had at first taken them to be, he did not abate his cautious movements in the least.

He was approaching the narrow up-hill path from the opposite direction now, and that would give him a better chance to see the outlaws if they made a move to throw themselves upon him.

Slowly he worked his way to the spot, and then pausing to listen, he was gratified to hear low, anxious voices.

The same two men were talking that he had heard a short time before.

CHAPTER VII.

WILD FINDS THE OUTLAWS' CAVE.

"It's funny," he heard one of them say. "Do you s'pose it could have been ther captain and the other man that was out there talkin' just before the wagon train went on?"

"No, I don't think it was them. If it was they would have come on, after they had sympathized with the men. Bold Blackburn can fool any one and make anybody believe that he is an honest cattle owner. He beats the deck at such business. If it was him you can bet that he has volunteered to go back with them to Weston. That is what he wants to do—make himself solid in the town. He wants to be able to go down there in disguise whenever he feels like it. That's the way he did in the last town we hung out around."

"Well, I hope you are right, but it runs in my cranium that somethin' happened out there that wasn't good for us. We ought to have sneaked out when we heard the talkin' an' seen jest what was goin' on."

"That wouldn't have done. We might have been seen, and then I guess we'd have been sorry for goin' out. No, there ain't anything happened. If it was ther captain and one of the new men, which he took with him, out there talking to the fellows belonging to the wagon train, you can bet that they have offered to go with the wagons to show them the way to Weston. I'll bet that's just what happened, come to think of it."

"Well, I suppose we have got to wait here till he comes, then?"

"That is just what we have got to do, so we may as well make the best of it. It may be a couple of hours before they come back, and it may be sooner."

At this the two villains lapsed into silence and Young Wild West shook his head with an air of satisfaction.

"Things are working pretty nicely now," he thought. "Now, if I can only get past those men, I may be able to find the way to the headquarters of the gang, without being shown the way, as the captain has to be. It must be a rather dangerous road, though, or they would not be so particular about waiting for him."

To get past the two men up the narrow ascent would be a hazardous undertaking.

But Young Wild West quickly conceived an idea of how it might be done.

Feeling around, he soon discovered a stone about the size of an egg.

Drawing himself back a few feet, he raised his arm and tossed the stone out in the center of the road.

It struck the rocky ground and rolled off, making considerable noise.

The two outlaws instantly pricked up their ears.

"What was that?" asked one.

"Some one coming, I guess," answered the other.

Then they both walked softly out, passing Wild by less than two feet.

But he was crouching close to the rock, and as the noise had not come from his direction, they did not once look that way.

They had not stepped more than six feet past his crouching form when the boy glided swiftly, but silently into the narrow place.

He knew that he must not lag a second if he expected to get there without their knowledge.

If he had chosen to do so he could easily have surprised the two villains and disposed of them in short order.

But he did not want to do this.

It had just struck him that they might be of great assistance to him in locating the headquarters of the Red Riders.

As Wild had often remarked, there was a great deal of luck always with him when he had anything difficult to accomplish.

And so it was in this case.

The outlaws paused when they got out to the edge of the trail, and after listening for a moment advanced a little further.

They remained there for fully a minute, and when they came back, satisfied that the noise had been caused by a stone rolling from the top of the cliff, Wild was safely past them.

He made his way softly up the steep incline and presently came upon two horses.

Then an idea struck him all of a sudden.

These must be the horses belonging to the two men!

And if the men knew the way to the retreat why shouldn't their horses?

"Good enough!" exclaimed the boy under his breath.

"Now, I guess I'll go on up to the top of the ridge."

It was but the work of a moment for him to untie the horses, and then leading them softly from the spot for a few yards, he mounted one and let the other go.

It was lucky for him that they were not fiery steeds, or the noise they would certainly have made might have been heard by the red-shirted outlaws.

It might have been that the horses were hungry, but anyhow they both headed toward the top of the ridge.

Wild did not attempt to guide the one he had mounted; he simply kept him behind the other one.

On at a good smart walk went the two horses, and soon there was not the least danger of their hoof-beats being heard by the men at the foot of the rocky trail.

Then Wild grew a little reckless and urged them into a canter.

He allowed them to take their own way, and when they began to slow down he did not urge them any.

Along narrow ledges they proceeded, making many sharp turns; down across miniature ravines and up again to a level stretch.

In this way the horses kept on until finally they halted before a solid wall of rock.

Wild dismounted.

He had no sooner done so when a muffled voice exclaimed: "Who comes?"

Not a word of response did the boy make; he simply glided off into the darkness and dropped behind a fallen tree.

"Who comes?"

The question was asked in a louder and clearer tone this time.

But again there was no answer.

Wild was not more than fifteen paces from where he had dismounted and he could see the outlines of the horses pretty well, considering how dark it was.

Suddenly he saw them turn slightly, and then they disappeared!

Young Wild West rubbed his eyes.

As used to seeing strange things as he was, this puzzled him not a little.

Where had the horses gone to?

That was the question he asked himself.

But he simply remained quiet and awaited developments.

The next instant two men appeared to come from out of the solid rock!

In the darkness he could not tell where they did come from.

"Funny, ain't it?" one of them said.

"Yes," was the reply. "Their horses must have got loose an' come on an' left 'em down there."

"That's about ther size of it. Won't there be some jaw-in' when they find it out!"

"I s'pose we ought to send 'em back. It's quite a little distance to walk, you know."

"Yes, we'll send 'em back. Ther captain will be in a hurry to git back, an' 'tain't likely he'll want to ride double."

"Well, we'll go an' report to Weissert an' see what he says."

The two men disappeared as quickly as they had come.

The instant they did so Young Wild West was on his feet making for the spot he had last seen them standing upon.

He never once thought of danger.

It was his idea to find the entrance to the retreat.

And within sixty ticks of a watch he had done so.

He found the secret opening of the cave.

Probably he would not have done so in the darkness if it had not been that there was a faint light coming from it.

In their surprise the outlaws had failed to take the lantern they had examined the horse with back into the interior of the big cave.

Without the least hesitation Wild glided through and found himself in a passage.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he crept forward to the end of the passage and turned abruptly to the left, where in the dim light from the lantern he could see an excellent hiding place.

"I am making pretty good headway," he muttered.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE DETECTIVE MADE OUT IN THE CAVE.

Of all the surprises he had ever been treated to in his whole life, Harry Harper got the worst when he felt himself suddenly lifted from the ground as he was crawling around the point of the rock a few feet ahead of Young Wild West.

He had time to cry out, but he did not think of doing so until a heavy hand was placed over his mouth.

Then he tried to do so, but it was too late, for his throat was clutched so tightly that it was impossible for him to utter a sound.

He was promptly carried among a whole band of men, and he realized that he had fallen into the clutches of the Red Riders.

It was not the first time that the young man had been captured by enemies, but he felt that he was in a desperate position, and he fully expected that Young Wild West would suffer the same fate as he.

He had not made the least sound to give him warning of what had happened, and he listened to hear the sounds of a struggle.

But when he heard the men talking about taking him to their retreat he gradually came to the conclusion that they had not looked to see if there had been any one with him.

"Well," he thought, "I am in hard luck, but I am glad

they have not found Wild. If they get him, too, there is no telling what will become of us."

Pretty soon he heard them say that they were not going to harm him, but leave it to the captain to decide what should be done with him when he returned from a trip somewhere.

And when he was finally lifted on a horse before one of the Red Riders and carried off up the mountain he resigned himself to his fate.

He had no thoughts of dying; he simply was uneasy about his being a captive in the hands of the villainous band.

He had heard considerable of Young Wild West and placed confidence enough in him to feel that he would be rescued.

It was a tedious journey up the mountain path, and it seemed much longer than it really was before the robber band finally came to a halt.

They did not take the trouble to blindfold him before taking him into the cave, but it was so dark and the fact of his being carried bodily made it impossible to see or imagine what way he was being taken, or how it looked.

When he got inside the cave and the rays of a smoking oil lamp struck his eyes he blinked like an owl, and then, just as he began to distinguish objects he was carried to a rather large niche and dropped rather roughly on the hard stone floor.

"Stay there, you sneakin' hound till ther capen comes back!" exclaimed one of the men.

"An' just think over what's goin' to happen to you when he does come," added another. "You're goin' to be killed, you sneakin' coyote! That's what is goin' to happen to yer!"

"If I am killed it will be the first time I ever have been, and that is one consolation," replied Harper, coolly.

"Any one to hear you talk would think that you are of the opinion that we are simply having a little joke with you," spoke up Weissert, the lieutenant.

"No, I don't think you are joking with me, but I guess the captain will say it is all right when I tell him my story."

"You guess he will. You can tell him all the stories you like, but you will either be plugged with lead, or have your heart cut out, just the same."

"Are you fellows real robbers?" asked Harry in a tone that implied that he was a little doubtful.

A number of the gang had gathered around, listening, and when they heard this they laughed boisterously.

"I don't believe you are," went on the detective in an easy tone of voice. "I don't believe any of you ever killed a woman to get the diamonds she wore in her ears."

This remark sounded rather novel to the outlaws and they did not know what to say to it.

Finally Weissert spoke up and said:

"You talk as though you had done something like that."

"I have."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have done such a thing twice in my life."

"What are you traveling with honest people for, then?"

"Because I wanted to get to Weston, where I thought I might have a chance to do some business in my line."

"And you came sneaking around to spy on us after we quit firing on the wagon train!"

"Yes, as soon as I saw you red fellows I made up my mind I was going to join your band."

The detective was now certain that he was making a good impression on the lawless men, and he meant to keep right at it.

"What did you come crawling to us in that way for, if you wanted to become a member of our band?" asked Weissert.

Harry put on an air of astonishment that was so real that his listeners were completely deceived.

"How do you suppose I would come—walk right out from the people I was with and yell out for you fellows to take me on your side?"

"Well, no," was the reply, "but you acted just as though you was trying to spy on us."

"Well, that is just what I was doing. I wanted to find out where you had gone before I made myself known to you. I wasn't going to run right out and jump into your arms and say, 'Here I am; take me!'"

"Well, all right," said Weissert. "You may be all right, and you may not. We'll wait and see what the captain says about it."

The detective kept right on talking, though, and there were plenty to listen to him.

If it had come to a vote the men would have decided to release him and permit him to become a member of the band.

The time flew by and there were no signs of the captain's return.

Harper induced his captors to take the cords from his wrists and ankles, and then he felt better.

He knew only too well that there was small chance for him to escape, even if his hands and feet were free.

From his position he could not see the place where he had been brought in, and had not the least idea of where the entrance was.

He thought of Young Wild West and wondered where he was.

"I feel confident that he will find the way to this place somehow, even if he has to wait until the captain comes back and follows him," he thought. "I have made pretty fair progress with the men since I have been here, but I don't know how I am going to make out with the captain. If he is as easy to deceive as his men it will be all right."

Pretty soon the detective noticed signs of considerable excitement among the outlaws in another part of the big cave.

It soon died out, however, and then he managed to learn, by listening to the talk around him, that the horses of the two men which had been left near the road to guide Bold Blackburn and his companion back to the cave, had come back without their owners.

A thrill shot through Harry Harper when he heard this.

Somehow it struck him instantly that Young Wild West was the cause of the horses returning without their riders.

Though the outlaws did not seem to think anything strange of it, the detective did.

If one horse had broken loose and come back to his stable in search of something to eat it would have seemed all right; but for both of them to break loose and return at the same time, that looked rather queer.

It was now getting pretty late and some of the outlaws began to turn in.

Two of them who had been wounded in the skirmish on the mountain road were pretty close to Harry.

Their wounds had been dressed in a very crude way by their companions, and as fever was now setting in, they were beginning to suffer.

One of the men kept crying for water every five minutes, and seeing that the villainous men did not pay much attention to his cries, the detective said:

"The man is wounded worse than you think. Bring some water here in a pail and I will give him a drink when he wants it."

"All right," growled one of them. "You kin 'tend to him if you want to. I'll get ther water for yer."

He suited the action to the words and the water was soon at Harry's disposal.

The young man really had a little pity for the wounded outlaw, as he could see that the fellow had not long to live.

A bullet had lodged in his abdomen, and though it had not pained him much at first, it was now getting in its work in earnest.

The detective gave him all the water he wanted and bathed his throbbing brow.

"Who are you?" asked the outlaw, who was in full possession of his faculties. "I never seen you before."

"I am a prisoner here," was the reply.

"What for?"

"Oh! they caught me as I was creeping away from the wagon train after the fight down on the road to Weston," said Harper, not wishing to go into details.

"Well, no matter what you might be, you have got a big heart in you. I heard you when you said you would look after me if they would bring ther water to you. Say! I feel better, but I know I am a goner. I know where I am hit, an' no one ever got over it after gettin' plugged there. If I die you kin have what's in my pockets. I hate ther rest of ther gang now, 'cause there wasn't one of 'em that would give me a drink of water."

The detective gave him another drink and went to bathing his head again.

The other wounded man had fallen in a feverish sleep, and so needed little attention.

Then the fellow who had taken such a liking to Harry began to grow worse.

He began to rave and cry out in agony, and many were the threats that came from the men who wanted to sleep.

Harry did the best he could to ease him, but about midnight he died in great agony.

A few minutes later it occurred to the captive to go through the dead man's clothes and take what had been bequeathed to him.

It was not a pleasant thing to do, to be sure, but he felt that he might be greatly benefited by so doing.

And so it proved, for he found a brace of revolvers, a good supply of cartridges, a hunting knife, a wig and false beard, a black mask and a few ounces of gold dust in the various pockets.

As all he had of value had been taken from him when he was captured, together with his weapons, the detective had no scruples in changing these things to his own pockets.

He had just made the change when a hand touched him on the leg, and, looking down, he saw the face of Young Wild West!

CHAPTER IX

JIM, CHARLIE AND JACK TAKE A HAND IN THE GAME.

Jim Dart and Cheyenne Charlie were not a little surprised when the wagon train came into town with two prisoners.

But they were still further surprised when they heard that it was the orders of Young Wild West that they should be placed in the lock-up and a strong guard kept over them till his return to Weston.

They did not know he had gone out of town.

But when the guide who had come over from Spondulicks told them of what had taken place at the forks on the mountain they saw to it that Wild's instructions were carried out to the very letter.

Then Charlie started to get his horse, and Jim hastened to the house.

He found Jack Robedee in the kitchen trying to learn the game of fan-tan of the Chinese cook.

Robedee got up when Jim entered.

"Where's Wild?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the reply. "That is what I am going to try to find out as soon as possible."

"Why, didn't you an' him go out together?"

"No, I have been over to Dove-Eye Dave's."

"Well, I heard Ike, ther coon, say that your horses were gone, so I thought you went somewhere together."

"No, I didn't go with him. It must have been Harry Harper. Wild and he seem to have some private business, you know."

"Yes, they are tryin' to locate ther hangout of the Red Riders who have just made their appearance around this part of ther country. Say! if you are going to look for Wild an' Harper, I s'pose I can go along?"

"Certainly. Charlie is going, too. But how is this? I thought you started for Spondulicks to see the widow?"

Robedee turned red in the face and looked sheepish.

"What is the trouble?" and Jim laughed when he propounded the question.

"Hang ther widow!" was the rather savage reply. "When I got over there I found she got married to a Mexican greaser yesterday."

Then Jim did laugh for fair.

It was Jack's first love affair, according to his own statement, and the fact of it having turned out so disastrously to him was quite enough to make one laugh.

"So, broken-hearted, you struck right back for Weston," said Jim.

"Broken heart be hanged! I found that our old friend, Lively Rick, was just startin' for here, so I come along with him. Don't say any more to me about lovely woman! This is my first, an' it will be my last. I've had enough of 'em."

"That's all right," retorted Dart. "I have heard people talk like that before. Where is Lively Rick?"

"Over at ther Gazoo. He seemed bent on getting full of whiskey, so I left him there an' come on home about my business."

"I see. Well, as your horse must be played out, and Harper has taken mine, I wish you would run over and get Dove-Eye's and old man Murdock's."

"All right!" and Jack was off without any further loss of time.

In about ten minutes he returned accompanied by Cheyenne Charlie.

Jim was ready, so they mounted and rode off.

A drizzling rain was falling, but they were used to roughing it in all sorts of weather, and so paid little attention to it.

They knew the exact spot where the wagon train had been held up, so they concluded that it must be in that vicinity where the outlaw band was located.

The road was not a new one to them, so they rode on at a good speed, but keeping a good lookout for the Red Riders, as they thought it might be that they had followed the wagons close into town.

But there was not a soul to be seen.

The three kept on their way, slackening their pace occasionally to listen.

But the only thing to be heard was the sighing of the wind through the mountain pines and the occasional wail-like cry of some night bird.

At length the fork was reached, and our friends brought their steeds to a halt.

The next moment a low whistle came to their ears.

At first Jim thought it was from Wild, but when it was quickly repeated he knew better.

But it might be the detective, so he thought it a good idea to answer it in the same way.

He had scarcely done so when the figure of a man suddenly showed up at the side of the road.

"Is that you, cap?" said a voice in a very low tone.

"Yes," answered Jim, realizing that it was one of the outlaws he was talking to, and bent on deceiving him if he possibly could.

"We've been waiting a good while for you. Ride right up here an' let's git to ther cave. We've got a prisoner there for you to pass judgment on."

"A prisoner!" echoed Jim in a low, muffled voice.

"Yep. A feller sneaked away from a wagon train that we had a fight with an' tried to spy on us. We caught him too nice for anything."

At this juncture the other man came out and showed himself.

"What's ther matter, cap? You don't seem to be in much of a hurry. Us two fellers have been waitin' here a good while for yer to come. Ain't you goin' right up to ther cave?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Jim in his natural voice. "Just hold up your hands, the pair of you, or off goes the top of your heads!"

The two villains nearly dropped to the ground from astonishment and consternation.

But they were covered by three revolvers and there was nothing for them to do but to obey.

Up went their hands, and then Jack Robedee quickly dismounted and walked up to them.

Jack knew what to do without being told, and in very short order he took their weapons from the surprised outlaws.

"Just tie their hands behind them," said Jim, "and then we will see what is to be done with them."

Charlie dismounted and assisted Jack in doing this.

"You are a fine pair, I must say," remarked Jim when the two men were fixed so they could not get away. "Took me for the captain, did you? Well, I'm real glad of that. Now, if you want to save your lives just show us where your hangout is. I don't think the captain will be here to-night, for it runs in my head that he is a prisoner in Weston."

The prisoners showed signs of great uneasiness when they heard this.

"Is the captain any relation to Doc Dempsey, the cattle king?" Jim went on to say.

There was no answer, and the boy then thrust his revolver a little closer to them.

"You had better answer the questions put to you," he exclaimed; "and in answering them be sure that you tell the truth. Now, then, is Doc Dempsey the captain? Speak quick, now, or off goes the top of your head!"

"Yes," answered one of the outlaws, "he's ther captain."

"That is just what I thought. Well, I am glad to inform you that he and his friend were caught by Young Wild West and sent to Weston, where they are now safely in the lock-up. It don't look as though he will be back to-night, does it?"

"It don't, that's a fact," admitted the other man.

"Well, then, suppose you show us where the headquarters of your gang is. You might better do that than bite the dust right here where you are standing, you know."

Jim Dart's manner must have been very persuasive, for the outlaws signified their willingness to take them to the cave.

"Our horses are up here a little ways," said one of them. "Just take us up there an' we will show you the way."

Charlie and Jack walked ahead with the captives and Jim rode after them, leading the horses.

They were soon at the spot where the outlaws had tied their horses.

But the animals were not there now!

"That's mighty funny!" exclaimed one of the red shirts. "Here's where we left 'em."

Our friends thought the villains were trying to deceive them in some manner.

Jim dismounted.

"There is no use in trying to do anything with them," he said. "They are bound to lie to us, anyhow. Just tie them to that tree, and perhaps when they have thought matters over they will give us the information we want."

"We hain't lied to you," protested one of them. "What we've said is ther truth, every word of it. Some one has been here an' took our horses! I hope I may die if I ain't right!"

"That's as sure as two an' two are four," added the other man.

"Well, show us ther way to ther cave on foot, then," spoke up Jack Robedee.

"It is too much of a walk in ther dark," was the reply.

"Go ahead and tie them to the tree," said Jim. "It is a sheltered spot here, and the rain can't strike us. We will stay right here till daylight."

"But how about the prisoner the Red Riders have got?" asked Charlie.

"They are goin' to keep him till ther captain gits back," spoke up one of the captives.

"If that is the case he will be all right. How old a man is he, anyway?"

"About thirty, I should reckon."

"Hair long or short?"

"Short—cut right close to his head."

"It must be Harry Harper, if they are telling the truth," observed Jim, turning to his companions.

"You kin shoot us ther minute you find that we ain't tellin' ther truth," said one of the men, earnestly. "We want to git out of this scrape with whole skins, if we kin, an' we are going to do it, even if we have to make our gang suffer for it."

"Your gang will suffer for it, that you may depend upon. We have your captain in jail, as I have already told you, so it will only be the question of a very short time before the headquarters will be found. You can easily imagine what will happen then."

The men admitted that they could, and then Jim continued:

"You have heard of Young Wild West, I suppose?"

"Yes, they say he is a regular terror."

"There is no mistake about that. He has made up his mind that the Red Riders of the Range won't last many days, and when he makes up his mind to a thing the ones he is after might just as well give up. Young Wild West is somewhere around these diggings now. He was with the

man you fellows captured, and you can just bet that he will get him away from your gang, too."

"If he does he is a good one."

"He is a good one," Cheyenne Charlie put in. "He is ther boss of this part of the country, and all honest folks are proud to be called his friends."

Just then they heard the sounds made by horses' hoofs coming down the hill.

Leveling his revolver in the direction of the prisoners, Jim exclaimed in a whisper:

"If that is any of your gang coming I want you to answer them just the same as though you were here alone. Do you understand?"

The wretches nodded to show that they did, and then our three friends got ready to do some quick shooting, for they certainly thought the approach of the outlaws would terminate in a scrimmage.

But it did not, for there proved to be only one of them.

He was the man who had been sent back with the horses, and when he got a little closer he called out:

"Hello, there!"

Jim now stood with his revolver close to the head of the man he had selected to do the talking, and a nod made him return the "hello."

"Has ther captain showed up yet?"

"Yes," came from the prisoner's lips.

"Good! I've brought back your horses."

That was all the outlaw said just then, for Cheyenne Charlie stepped up and thrust his shooter under his nose.

"Please git off that horse!" commanded the scout in his easy way.

The man did so, promptly enough.

He knew he had fallen into the hands of enemies and he knew also that he stood no show to make a fight for it.

"You ain't alone, Buck," said one of the other captives, as he was led up to the tree.

The man made no reply to this, but he was evidently doing a whole lot of thinking.

Probably it occurred to him that things were taking a rather bad start since the arrival of the Red Riders in that part of the country.

"That makes three of you here, an' two in ther lock-up in Weston brings the count up to five," remarked Charlie, as he tied the man to the tree. "How many are there left of you?"

"Seventeen, countin' them that's wounded," was the reply.

It now began to rain real hard, so our friends tied their horses and drew well back under the shelving rock.

Jack Robedee came across a pile of dry wood which had

been placed there by the two outlaws, who had intended to start a fire to make their wait more cheerful.

No blaze could be seen from the road, nor could it be observed from the path that came down the ridge until one got within a few yards of it.

Jim told Jack he could start a fire if he liked, and Robe-dee lost no time in getting one going.

They were just getting around the fire when Cheyenne Charlie's horse gave a whinny.

This was quickly answered by another horse, and the next minute the horses that belonged to Young Wild West and Jim Dart came trotting up from the road.

"Here are the horses! Now where are Wild and Harry Harper?" Jim exclaimed.

CHAPTER X.

THE VILLAINS ESCAPE.

When Doc Dempsey and his man left Weston that night they were in an excellent humor.

They had learned considerable, and they meant to hold up the stage coach when it went out the next day.

True, he was smarting a little from the effects of Young Wild West's treatment, and he was resolved to get even with the handsome young dead-shot.

"What do you think of Young Wild West, Stitch?" he asked his companion.

"I think he is a regular wonder," was the reply.

"Do you think he suspected anything wrong about us?"

"No. You played your part too well for that."

"I make a good cattle king, don't I?"

"Yes, you do, cap. No one would ever think you was Bold Blackburn, ther captain of ther Red Riders."

"Well, that is the way to do it. I rather guess we are going to have plenty of good luck around these diggings. That fellow, Young Wild West, bothers me considerable, though. Well, it can't be any worse than it was where we come from. If we get drove out we will go somewhere else."

"That's it, cap. I'm mighty glad that I joined your crowd."

The two had waited till the rain had slackened before starting up the mountain road, and they were riding along at a stiff pace.

When they got halted by Young Wild West they were two surprised men, as has been stated.

But Bold Blackburn never gave up.

When he found one plan would not work he was already dodging out another.

Which Sprague was rather dejected, though.

The nearer they got to Weston the more uneasy he became.

Young Wild West had ordered them to be placed in jail, and that meant that they would probably be hanged the next day, if it was proved that they were two of the Red Riders.

When the two villains were placed in the lock-up something like a groan came from the lips of Sprague.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the captain with a low laugh.

"I guess we will soon be done for now," was the answer in a dismal tone of voice.

"Maybe we will and maybe we won't."

"What do you mean by that, Bold Blackburn?"

"Well, since you are so much worried, I will tell you. You know how long they kept us waiting outside here before the fellow they sent for come?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"There was quite a crowd around us just then, was'there not?"

"Yes, I remember that, too."

"Well, I fixed it so we could get out of here then."

"You did!" exclaimed the man.

"Yes, but don't talk so loud. Walls have ears sometimes, you know."

The two were in a small square room that was built of logs and the door was a heavy oaken one.

That made it impossible for them to force their way out.

And their hands had been tied when they were thrust into the place.

A streak of light came through one of the cracks between the logs from a smoky oil lamp that was hanging in the hall and the villain called Stitch could see his companion quite plainly.

Suddenly he saw him put his hand in his pocket.

"How did you git your hands loose, cap?"

"Oh! a fellow untied them for me when we was waitin' outside," was the retort.

"How did you come to git him to do it?"

"I whispered to him to thrust his hand in my pocket and take out what money there was there. There was something like a thousand there, you know, since Young Wild West and his gang did not take anything from me but my weapons."

"I see! Who was ther fellow?"

"He happened to be the man what goes on ther watch at daylight."

"What! on watch here?"

"Yes."

"Well, do you think he will let us out?"

"Oh! yes, as soon as he comes on he will let us out. We will tie him up, then, and steal a couple of horses and light out."

"Good enough!" and the spirits of Stitch Sprague went up to the top notch.

The conversation had been carried on in very low tones, so the jailer could not hear them.

Bold Blackburn untied the cords that held his companion's arms behind him, after which he lay down and went to sleep as calmly as if he was in his retreat up on the range.

Stitch tried to sleep, too, but he could not succeed very well.

The hours wore on and at length the jailer was relieved by the one who had agreed to set the prisoners free.

Five minutes later he unlocked the door of the cell.

"Hist!" he exclaimed.

Instantly Bold Blackburn awoke and was on his feet.

"Is it gettin' daylight?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "Hurry up. This is dangerous business, an' I don't know how it is goin' to turn out."

"Oh, it will turn out all right. You have a big day's work, if you only know it."

The man who had been acting the part of a cattle king walked out of the cell, followed by his companion.

"Are you here alone?" he asked the jailer.

"Yes," was the retort. "Now hurry an' tie me, so it will look as though you got out yourselves an' caught me nappin'."

"We will attend to that right away. I suppose you took the money you got from my pocket and hid it somewhere, didn't you?"

"Not much! I've got it right in my pocket."

"That's the best way. Now give us the revolvers and knives you promised to."

The instant Bold Blackburn got the knife in his hand he made a quick lunge with it.

The blade went deep into the left breast of the man.

It was a diabolical deed, but the scoundrel did not seem to mind it in the least.

"There is no use in letting him have that money," he said coolly. "And what is the use of letting such a man live? A traitor should not be allowed to live, anyway!"

Stitch Sprague shrugged his shoulders.

He had not expected anything like that to take place.

But he was much elated at getting free.

One minute later the two Red Riders were outside the jail, leaving the traitorous jailer lying on the floor, breathing his last.

And when they went out every cent the jailer had in his pockets went with them.

Luck seemed to be on the side of the scoundrels, for they soon got hold of a couple of horses.

Then with the speed of the wind, they rode for the range to join the band.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Our three friends looked at each other significantly when they saw the horses.

The fact that the beautiful stallion belonging to Young Wild West was riderless made it look as though the brave young scout was dead.

They knew what had become of the detective, but what had happened to Wild they knew not.

Jim very easily caught his horse and patted him on the nose.

He tied him to a tree, but the sorrel refused to be caught.

There was only one person who could catch him without a lasso, in fact, and that was his owner.

The animal scampered away and ran up the ascent leading to the top of the ridge.

Jim Dart was more worried than the others.

After a while he calmed down a trifle, and then he began questioning the three prisoners sharply.

But though they answered him readily enough, he could glean nothing from them that would imply that Wild had been killed or captured.

A couple of hours passed by.

Our friends knew it would be extremely dangerous for them to make their way to the top of the ridge in the darkness, so they sat by the fire and waited for daylight to come.

Finally the first gray streaks of dawn began to show in the east.

As soon as it was light enough to see Jim proposed that they start on a search for Wild.

The three captives pleaded not to be left there tied to the tree, but it was out of the question to think of taking them all with them.

At the suggestion of Cheyenne Charlie they decided to take one of the villains with them, so he could show them the way.

The one who had been so earnest in asserting that he was speaking the truth was the man selected.

One of the outlaws' horses was easily caught, and the man, with his hands still tied behind him, was lifted to the saddle.

The other two prisoners were left tied to the tree and our friends rode up the hill in search of Young Wild West.

They had not been gone more than ten minutes when the two helpless outlaws pricked up their ears.

They distinctly heard the clatter of horses' hoofs coming along the road.

They did not know whether it was a friend or foe who was approaching, but they hoped that it might be Bold Blackburn returning, after all.

The clatter suddenly ceased and the next instant they realized that at least two horses had entered the narrow path leading to where they were tied to the tree.

A cry of joy left the lips of the helpless outlaws as two horsemen suddenly appeared before them.

Their fondest hopes had been realized, for the men were no others than Bold Blackburn and Stitch Sprague!

The villains had been riding hard and their horses were covered with foam.

"Hello, cap!" called out the two men in unison. "You couldn't have come along at a better time. Three fellers from town have just gone up ther hill, an' they've got one of our men with 'em, an' they are going to make him show 'em where our hangout is. Hurry up! Get us loose, so's we kin take a hand in ther fightin' when we come up with ther hounds what are tryin' to hunt us out of our hole."

The man called Stitch promptly jumped off his horse and severed the bonds that held the prisoners.

Then Bold Blackburn briefly questioned them and learned as much of the situation as they knew.

"There are your horses over there," said the villain, and he pointed to the steeds the third man had brought down from the retreat.

The men soon caught them, and then mounting, they led the way to the top of the ridge.

Bold Blackburn was the only man in the party who possessed a pistol.

He had taken this from the jailer when he made his escape.

The quartette of outlaws had just got well around the bend when another horse and rider came up the trail and turned into the narrow path.

It was the man who had given his name as John Sedgwick, and who had been given a position as bartender at the Gazoo.

He had risen very early that morning and had overheard the two outlaws talking as they were looking for a chance to steal a couple of horses to ride off with.

And he heard just enough to recognize them as two of the men who had robbed him in the stage coach.

That made Quiet John mad, and without saying a word to any one, or making any noise to arouse the still sleeping

town, he got one of Brown's horses and started in pursuit of the escaping villains.

He managed to keep within hearing distance of the clattering hoofs, resolving that as soon as it became light enough to ride up and open fire upon them.

But when the dull gray light of the morning arrived his courage wavered a little, and so he kept putting the attack off.

When the two men turned into the narrow mountain path Sedgwick was close enough to see them, but instead of dashing right in after them he allowed his horse to walk slowly up to the spot, and he remained there listening to what was taking place on the other side of the wall of rock.

The fact of there being four now, instead of two, made him less anxious to tackle them.

But he wanted revenge on the robbers for taking all he had, and resolved to follow them and trust to luck that something would turn up in his favor.

John had heard them say that three men from Weston had just gone up the hill with one of the band a prisoner, and that made him feel that there was a chance of the outlaws not having everything all their own way.

If the four should get into a scrimmage with the three from Weston he would jump in and take a hand.

Quiet John gritted hard upon his teeth when he made this resolve.

Up the path he rode, revolver in hand and an expression of grim determination on his face.

The outlaws were not so far ahead of him but that he could hear the hoof-beats, and he even urged his horse forward at a faster gait.

Five minutes later the heart of the pursuing man gave a jump.

Shots were being exchanged at a point not two hundred yards distant!

Half a dozen shots rang out in rapid succession, and then John saw a single horseman dashing toward him at a break-neck pace.

But that was not all! The horseman was Bold Blackburn!

Quiet John's nerve did not desert him.

Up went his revolver, and taking a quick aim, he pressed the trigger twice in rapid succession.

Crack! Crack!

As the second report rang out the outlaw captain threw up his hands and tumbled from the saddle.

The riderless horse went on past the bartender with the speed of the wind, and reining in his own steed, he dismounted to see if he had really killed the villain.

The outlaw lay face upward, and a tiny stream of blood oozing from a hole in his left breast told the tale.

Bold Blackburn, the leader of the Red Riders of the Range, had played his last card!

Sedgwick suddenly heard some one calling to him, and, turning, he beheld Young Wild West and the detective beckoning to him:

They were both mounted, Wild on his own handsome sorrel, and Harper on one of the outlaws' steeds.

Behind them were Jim Dart, Cheyenne Charlie and Jack Robedee.

In order to explain how Wild and Harper had escaped from the cave we must go back to the time when our hero succeeded in gaining an entrance to the cave.

He found a snug hiding place and waited until nearly all the outlaws had gone to sleep.

From his hiding place he could see Harper, and when he saw him ministering to the wants of the dying outlaw he nodded approvingly.

After awhile he crawled over to his friend and made himself known.

Then while the guard was pacing back and forth near the entrance Young Wild West and the detective helped themselves to a red shirt and plumed hat apiece and started in to do a daring act.

They decided to make prisoners of every man in the cave!

Five minutes later the guard suddenly found a pistol to his head!

"Make the least outcry and you will be a dead man!" whispered the voice of Young Wild West.

The fellow was then bound and gagged and placed in a corner.

There was now only one man awake in the place besides our two friends and the helpless guard, and that was the wounded fellow.

The detective told him if he gave the least alarm he would surely die, and that was enough to keep him quiet.

Then the most dangerous part of the programme was begun.

Harper started around among the sleeping outlaws and took their weapons from them, one by one.

So silently and skillfully did he do his work that at the expiration of ten minutes he had accomplished the task.

While he was doing this Wild was preparing ropes and cords to bind the prisoners.

The first sleeper was tackled and bound and gagged before he knew what had happened.

And so it went on till there were only five who were not bound.

The first one of these managed to let out a cry of alarm and the others awoke and sprang to their feet.

But that was all the good it did them, for when they felt for their revolvers they found they had none!

"Surrender, or we will be compelled to shoot you down like dogs!" cried Wild.

But the men were desperate, and they started in to fight.

One of them got hold of a knife somehow, and he pitched right in with it.

The result was that a bullet from the detective's revolver laid him low.

That caused the other four to give in, and they were soon bound securely, as their companions had been.

It was pretty well toward daylight by the time the great haul was made, but Wild and Harper did not cease working.

They meant to take their prisoners to Weston with them.

They marched out a prisoner and a horse alternately until they had sixteen men tied each upon a horse's back!

Then the horses were placed double file and a lariat was run between them, each bridle rein being fastened securely to it.

It was broad daylight by the time this was accomplished, and then with Young Wild West ahead and the detective in the rear, the unique cavalcade started.

For their own safety the outlaws were compelled to show the way to get over the dangerous parts of the trail, and so they made pretty fair headway along the ridge.

In due time they came upon Jim, Charlie and Jack, and then John Sedgwick and the three outlaws appeared on the scene, resulting in the killing of the three, the captain falling a victim to the quiet man.

That is about all there is to the story of Young Wild West and the Detective.

The prisoners were taken to Weston without mishap and they were disposed of in accordance with the custom of that place.

The Red Riders of the Range had not lasted long in that vicinity.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AT THE STAKE; OR, THE JEALOUSY OF ARIETTA," which will be the next number (10) of "Wild West Weekly."

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